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The Security Situation in Nigeria

Summary

Nigeria, including the secessionist Eastern Region of Biafra, remains reasonably calm outside of the embattled areas along the northern border of Biafra. Apparently all US citizens have been withdrawn from the vicinity of the fighting, and the evacuation of all expatriates, including official US personnel, from Biafra via Port Harcourt is now being arranged. Federal forces have reached their first major objective in the northwest of Biafra, the town of Nsukka, and Biafran troops have fallen back to positions closer to Enugu, their capital. Even if federal forces continue to defeat Biafran forces, pacification of the Ibos is likely to be a long and bloody affair. Under these conditions the safety of any white person in the East cannot be assured. In the North itself, anti-American sentiment is being fanned by official newspaper and radio propaganda comparing US support of the Congolese government with US nonsupport--militarily--of the federal government.

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American Citizens in Nigeria

1. There are 1,000 American citizens and dependents still in Biafra. Some 900 dependents left the region in June. Of the American citizens remaining, some are employed by the oil industry at Port Harcourt, some are missionaries spread throughout the countryside, and some are Peace Corps volunteers scattered throughout Biafra. Only about 50 are US officials. In addition to the Americans there are some 5,000 British citizens and a much smaller number of Canadians and other Europeans.

2. In the remainder of Nigeria there are about 6,000 Americans: over 2,000 in the former Northern Region, about 2,000 in the Lagos and Mid-West areas, and some 1,500 in the former Western Region.

The State of the War

3. The federal government appears to be doing fairly well at the moment. The federal army's drive into Biafra apparently has captured the key junction points of Nsukka in the northwest and Ogoja in the northeast. The navy's fairly effective blockade has impeded the flow of arms into Biafra and has caused some scarcity of foodstuffs. Moreover the federal government has greater means to secure

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international military assistance such as the six Czech jet fighter-trainers which Lagos reportedly expects later this month. If the federal air force can quickly find qualified pilots to fly them, this transaction could have an important effect on the outcome of the war.

4. Notwithstanding these successes, the war could go on for some time. The federal army has more resources than do the Biafrans, but it faces enormous logistical problems and it is moving into a region where the population is hostile. Its overland movement is hampered and its men and equipment are being severely strained by the rains now in progress. Furthermore, the Biafran army has been stubbornly resisting the federal advance.

Situation in Eastern Nigeria

5. Most Biafran Ibos are maintaining a fairly normal pattern of life despite the war on their northern border and the stringent economic blockade. However, the million Ibo refugees who have flocked into Biafra from the rest of Nigeria, are still restive and unpredictable. Thus far, expatriates--foreigners of all nationalities--have been generally well treated, although the Biafrans have resented the departure of many expatriate technicians and

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administrators. Ibos--many of whom have studied in the US--generally like Americans, and the US community in Biafra seems to be in little danger from the local populace. (Americans might be in considerable danger if federal troops moved south.) The British are less favorably regarded by the Ibos, who believe that Britain has historically shown partiality toward Northerners.

6. A new wave of expatriate evacuation is now in progress. The 145 Peace Corps volunteers--most of them left unemployed by Biafra's closing of its schools--are already on the way out. A more general evacuation has also begun, stimulated by the federal government's decision of 14 July to permit a ship or ships to pass through the blockade to Port Harcourt to evacuate foreigners. Lagos stressed that this would be a one-time operation for all countries and would be the last time such permission will be granted. The British may act as coordinators for the operation since they have the most evacuees and ships available. The US Embassy in Lagos reports that it will take several days to get the ships to Port Harcourt.

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Meanwhile, evacuees are moving south to Port Harcourt where accommodations and a functioning evacuation staff are available.

Situation in the Remainder of Nigeria

7. The federal government, in the midst of its pre-occupation with the war in Biafra, must also keep its eye on restiveness elsewhere in Nigeria. In Lagos itself, the war seems far away, although there have been some sabotage attempts, probably by Ibos. Federal police and army units have strengthened security measures and there are roadblocks in strategic locations.

8. The Yorubas of the Western Region, long resentful over Northern domination will probably remain quiescent as long as the federal military effort appears successful and their leader, Chief Awolowo, continues as the top civilian in the federal government. There have recently, however, been small-scale riots in Ibadan, the Western capital, where police are undermanned.

9. The Mid-West Region has a serious Ibo problem of its own with many of its large minority Ibo group sympathizing with Biafra. The Mid-West has already refused northern

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troop transit, and if the federal government decided to move through the region against Biafra, there could be resistance by the Ibo tribesmen.

10. Gowon's government is also at odds with the US and UK. Lagos has reacted sharply to UK and US refusal to supply substantial amounts of arms for the federal military effort. Gowon was particularly upset over the US refusal, in view of the assistance the US has just given the Congolese Government. Nigerian press and radio, particularly in the "hawkish" North, have indulged in strong criticism of the US in comparing the mercenary revolt in the Congo with Biafran secession.